#### **MAY 2021**

# **Energy Assistance Program Communication TOOLKIT**

May 5, 2021 joint press release with MN Public Utilities Commission:

Minnesota Public Utilities Commission and Department of Commerce urge

360,000 ratepayers at risk for utility disconnection to apply now for Energy

Assistance

[https://mn.gov/commerce/media/news/#/detail/appld/2/id/480319]

#### Videos for social media and news media:

Commerce Commissioner Grace Arnold video

Commerce Energy Assistance Program Director Michael Schmitz video

### Flyers for social media and printouts

MN Energy Assistance Flyer - English

MN Energy Assistance Flyer – Spanish

MN Energy Assistance Flyer - Somali

MN Energy Assistance Flyer - Hmong

MN Energy Assistance Flyer – Karen

### Social media posts

Share posts about Energy Assistance from the Department of Commerce
Minnesota Department of Commerce Facebook account
Minnesota Department of Commerce Twitter account

Copy and paste one of the posts below

- Images posted below right click to save images to add to your posts
- Images can also be videos or flyers posted above

# POST 1: Twitter/ Facebook

VISUAL – insert link to Commerce Commissioner Grace Arnold <u>video</u> https://youtu.be/ci199a73xw0

360k+ households in MN have past-due utility bills. To avoid disconnects, consumers should apply NOW for Energy Assistance – @MNCommerce acted so more MNs are eligible.

Spread the word about #MNEnergyAssistance: Keep the lights on for MN homes.

https://mn.gov/commerce/media/news/#/detail/appld/2/id/480319

#### **POST 2: Twitter/Facebook**

VISUAL – insert link to <u>video</u> of Commerce Energy Assistance Program Director Michael Schmitz https://youtu.be/qo6P5recUOQ

How many MN households have unpaid bills for electric, gas utilities? 360k+ MN households

Avoid utility disconnects
Encourage MNs to apply NOW for Energy Assistance
<a href="https://mn.gov/commerce/eap.jsp">https://mn.gov/commerce/eap.jsp</a>

Keep the lights on for MN homes <a href="https://mn.gov/commerce/media/news/#/detail/appld/2/id/480319">https://mn.gov/commerce/media/news/#/detail/appld/2/id/480319</a> #MNEnergyAssistance

### POST 3: FACEBOOK – image: new income guidelines

Is paying electric, gas bills a struggle for you – or a friend or family member?

Avoid being disconnected by the utility company.

Consumers who apply for the Energy Assistance Program are protected for one year from being disconnected.

The Energy Assistance Program @MNCommerce now has higher income eligibility and extended deadline to apply, so thousands more Minnesotans qualify and have more time to apply.

Call MN Commerce: 1-800-657-3710, and press 1
Apply online <a href="https://mn.gov/commerce/eap.jsp">https://mn.gov/commerce/eap.jsp</a>
Keep the lights on – apply now #MNEnergyAssistance

#### ARTICLE for newsletter / website / email – image: disconnect 1

#### Past due electric or gas bill? Avoid utility disconnection

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission and the Department of Commerce urge consumers with past-due electric and gas bills to apply now for the Energy Assistance Program to avoid having their utility service disconnected. In Minnesota, about 360,000 households served by regulated utilities have past-due utility bills for electric and gas, with approximately \$135 million in unpaid utility bills.

Beginning in August 2021, regulated utilities can resume normal service, including utility disconnections for consumers who have unpaid utility bills. Utilities can send disconnection notices starting June 1 and can begin disconnections August 2.

### Utility consumers can avoid being disconnected by taking steps to:

### 1. Apply for the Energy Assistance Program

Consumers who have *submitted* an application that is pending OR has been approved for the Energy Assistance Program will be protected from utility disconnection for one year, through April 30, 2022. Households with incomes below 60 percent of the state's median income may be eligible, which is about \$65,000 in annual income for a household of four. Only the past three months of income are counted, and recent stimulus payments or pandemic unemployment insurance premiums are not counted.

Minnesotans should **apply now** to determine if you are income-eligible for the Energy Assistance Program. Request an application or find your local service provider for the Energy Assistance Program here:

Online: mn.gov/commerce/eap.jsp

• By phone: Call 800-657-3710 and press 1.

The Department of Commerce has expanded Energy Assistance by raising income eligibility and extending the deadline to apply to September 1, 2021. More information:

Minnesota Department of Commerce expands Energy Assistance Program so 100,000 more households are eligible

[ https://mn.gov/commerce/media/news/?id=477576 ]

#### 2. Request to set up a plan to repay what you owe

Consumers with past-due bills can call their utility and **request to set up a plan to pay what they owe.** Regulated utilities will not charge late fees or penalties for consumers who have entered and are complying with their plan for payment (including one missed payment if a consumer agrees to re-enter their plan).

**Consumers who need assistance should call their utility to discuss available options.** For additional help, the PUC Consumer Affairs Office (CAO) is available to answer questions and to provide consumer mediation services. Ratepayers can contact the CAO at 651-296-0406, or 1-800-657-3782. Email at customer.puc@state.mn.us.

Apply online at the Department of Commerce: <a href="mailto:mn.gov/commerce/eap.jps">mn.gov/commerce/eap.jps</a>
Or call the Minnesota Department of Commerce: 1-800-657-3710, and press 1.

Some things to know about the Energy Assistance Program:

- You can rent or own your home to qualify. For households who have already received assistance, even more benefits may be available.
- Funds can be used to help households pay energy bills, get reconnected or prevent energy disconnection, get fuel delivered, learn about efficiency and safety, and repair or replace homeowners' broken heating systems.
- Your income is considered for the previous 3 months, and does not include COVID-related payments such as federal stimulus checks.

 Households with young children, people with disabilities, veterans, seniors and those experiencing unemployment or financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are especially encouraged to apply.

### IMAGE OPTIONS for social media posts / website updates / e-newsletters

Right click to copy/save these images

Utility bill w Commerce contact info for Instagram/ Twitter



### Unpaid gas or electric utility bill?

Avoid utility shutoff
Apply NOW for the
Energy Assistance Program

Call the MN Dept of Commerce
800-657-3710 and press 1
Search online for
Minnesota Department of Commerce
energy assistance







# Avoid utility disconnect – apply NOW for Energy Assistance

HIGHER income eligibility for 2021

Search online for Minnesota Department of Commerce energy assistance

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	ANNUAL INCOME LIMIT
1 person	\$33,918
2 persons	\$44,355
3 persons	\$54,791
4 persons	\$65,228
5 persons	\$75,664
6 persons	\$86,101